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ÆSTHETIC ACTIVITY IN PHOTOGRAPHY

The scope of the camera as an aid to pictorial expression has often been demonstrated. It is only within recent years, however, that photography claims a place among the arts, as a medium of individual expression.



MAN IN ARMOR
By Frank Eugene

This has given rise to some differences of opinion. The amateur is wont to look at photography as a pastime, and the professional photographer is prone to cling to the prescribed methods and academic standards, by which he himself has learned to use the process successfully, and is therefore astonished and even resentful when he finds the traditions which he respects departed from by others. The artist, who is in a position to be the best judge, is often too ignorant of photography and its possibilities. Although he regards photography as a valuable handmaid as long as it facilitates his work, he considers it too mechanical a medium, and ascribes to accident anything artistic that the camera might produce.

I have heard it said over and over again by artists, while looking over some photographic journal, "If I took up photography I would do just as good work!" How futile it is to talk thus! The artists might rest assured that, unless a man really likes the process and heartily enjoys the work he is doing, there is not the ghost of a chance, whatever his knowledge and ability as an artist may be, that he will produce a good print or anything resembling a good print. The public, although it



TRAGEDY
By W. B. Dyer



is not particularly bent on intellectual treats in art, but is desirous rather of being amused by it, is far more just in its estimate. It has been patronizing artistic workers like C. H. White, Gertrude Käsebier, F. H. Day, and Rudolf Eikemeyer, Jr., for years; and although it was not prepared to rank these camera workers among artists, it was pleased with the new treatment, so refreshing and



AN ARRANGEMENT
By Clarence H. White

unconventional when likened to the stereotype, smooth work of the ordinary professional photographer with which it has been familiar.

In discussing photography, one involuntarily stumbles on the question, Can a photographer be as much of a technician, poet, and individuality as an artist? What differentiates the genius from the ordinary mortal, and lifts him above the multitude? In my opinion, it is effected by the possession of these gifts—which others may possess, but not in the same degree, and never in conjunction—namely, first, the power of selection, in which technical accomplishments find their expression; second, the depth of emotion which formulates the

conception of the idea to be conveyed; and third, perseverance, dependent largely on the photographer's temperament and constitution.

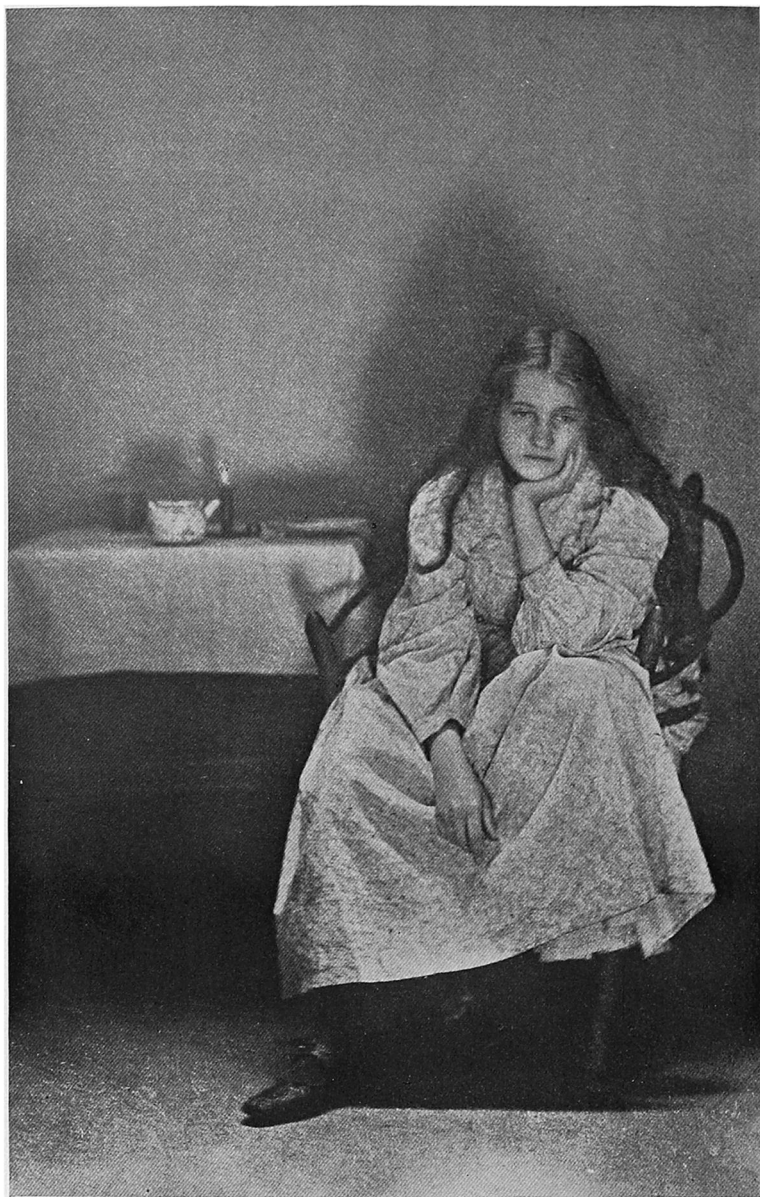
In the selection of his subject, the photographer is as much an artist as the painter, except that he is forced, unlike the painter, to limit himself to the reproduction of realities. He must have



MENELEK

By F. Holland Day

mastered the science of composition, the laws of perspective, the effects of empty space and linear beauty, the massing of light and shade, and the art of values, the latter particularly complicated because of the unreliability of photographing color values. In short, he must be a connoisseur to such a point that he is aware at what moment he can realize a certain effect and express it in the negative. The ability to select, after the setting of the picture has been suc-



WHEN MY DREAM COMES TRUE
By W. B. Dyer



cessfully chosen and composed, and atmosphere and passing figures form a perfect harmony with the premeditated conception, surpasses in spontaneity all other modes of expressing an artistic idea. It is the moment in which the photographer can show genius. To wait for days at the same hour for a certain effect, to wait for years for a certain atmospheric condition, to patiently develop the plate and go through the process of printing, and that not quite legitimate procedure of retouching, demands the practice of a rare perseverance, with knowledge, chance, and judgment as allies. This is merely to prove that genius is possible in photography.

The recent exhibitions of the New York Photo-Secession at Toronto, Canada, San Francisco, and the National Art Club, New York, the Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington, the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburg, the latter the most representative exhibition ever held in the country, showing three hundred pictures by fifty-four individual workers, afforded a unique opportunity of comparing the prevailing styles and methods of applying photography to artistic ends. The qualification of a picture in order to find admission into a photo-secession exhibition must be that it give evidence of personal artistic intention, irrespective of the methods employed, provided only that they belong to photography. And it may be said that throughout the exhibits there was no difficulty in identifying the various productions of the stronger and more individual workers. For they clearly and unmistakably reflected the task, the preferences, even the imagination, of the individual, and bore the impress of local influence, not only by the nature of the subjects selected and portrayed, or by the method or process employed, but by those subtler qualities which only become palpable to the connoisseur by the difference of effects produced upon feeling and imagination.

In the present article it is not our intention to criticise the pictures in detail. There is a certain character which pervades most of them, a tendency towards the mysterious and bizarre; in many cases all outline and detail are so suppressed and lost in delicate shadow that their meaning and intention are hard to discover, and their æsthetic value is rather that they are devoid of offense than that they possess positive charm. This is quite natural, as the movement is meant as a revolt from the conventional photographic rendering of sharp details and contrasts. Most of them are rather elusive and indefinite in character; the mere suggestion of form and features leave a good deal for imagination, yet the delicacy of treatment and selection, the composition, denote in most cases keen pictorial perception. And although we may deplore that, with a few exceptions like White in his illustrations for "Eben Holden," and Stieglitz in his various works, they do not devote their talent to a saner and more normal art, their work is, nevertheless, refreshing, and is the outcome of intelligent and consistent effort. But it is hard to understand why

they do not find more inspiration in the depiction of life and atmospheric effects, and the realistic tendencies of modern life with its variety of incidents and phases, which would be self-explanatory and convincing. Grace and subtlety their work undoubtedly possesses, and if originality, as in the case of Eugene and Steichen, has overreached legitimate bounds, it must be remembered that the evidence of a revolution is generally in proportion to the degree of the evil which it seeks to reform; and even the layman is aware that there is a very



FRAGMENT OF ARMAGEDDON
By F. Holland Day

large amount of photography in America and elsewhere, of the commercial and every-day order, of such a vulgar character that an antidote of the most searching kind is necessary. It is exceedingly interesting, even as the pre-Raphaelites and many offsprings of reaction were interesting and powerful for good.

The movement, although it scarcely covers ten years, has quite a history of its own. In the early nineties photography was exploited merely for moneyed ends, and its artistic possibilities obscured by commercialism. The photographers aimed to please the public, and the latter accepted their work as representative of the art at its best. In looking over the contents of old-fashioned albums, we will see that

mediocrity prevailed. Here and there a print recorded a good likeness, but for the most part we find the persons posed in awkward attitudes, amid surroundings lamentable in their ugliness, and with their faces retouched down to smooth and lifeless monotonies of surface. There were only a few workers at that time who realized that photography also was a medium of individual expression. They were notably Cox, R. Eike-meyer, Jr., J. E. Dumont, and Alfred Stieglitz, who has long held the premier position among American pictorial workers.

Cox made excellent portraits, in which he ignored the conventional lighting and posing of the sitter; Dumont composed *genre* pictures, like the "Clarinet Player," with scrupulous care; but it was really Eike-meyer and Stieglitz who set out to invade new fields of activity. They found themselves confronted by many problems to be solved. Each new picture by Stieglitz was an experiment. In his "Old Mill" he tackled the problem of light and shadow, which he has again taken up



THE BUBBLE
By Clarence H. White



SNOW SHADOWS
By Eva Watson Schütze

lately in his beach scenes. In his "Venice" he became absorbed in the beauty of reflections, and in his New York park scenes he studies the effect of snow and hoar-frost in sunlight. To realize sunlight was always one of his great ambitions. He introduced moving figures for the first time in his "Scurrying Home" and lay in the Kabwyk Dunes on the same spot every day for almost a week to accomplish his task. Then he took up photographing night scenes, and produced those beautiful prints "La Plaza Hotel Square" and "An Icy Night."

In the mean while Eikemeyer had produced his "Vesper Bells," and written a treatise, "How to Make a Picture"; he elaborated on Dumont's "Clarinet Player," and set himself the difficult task of placing five figures, four children at that, in one composition. The result

was "The Dance Lesson." The picture lacks in spontaneity, the poses look a little bit forced, but a great step in advance was made. Pictorial figure composition had become possible, and it was he who opened the road for the work of C. H. White and Edmund Stirling. They were true searchers in quest of beauty. They wended along the untrodden path courageously, and were not intimidated by obstacles. Each successive experience but added to their



REFLECTIONS—NIGHT

By Alfred Stieglitz

science of interpretation until their efforts were crowned with that success which, instead of satisfying the artist, but spurs him on to loftier purposes.

Their work was conducted in comparative obscurity; but this did not betoken stagnation on their part, but rather the knowledge that the general public was not interested in the details of their achievements and successes. Things always run in grooves until some one has the wit to resist the prevailing trend and starts a new path. The contented ones deep down in the rut laugh at the mere eccentricity of the departure until we all get used to it and find that the new way answers so much better our requirements. Then we catch the contagion, adapt ourselves conscientiously, and are surprised to



PORTSMOUTH PIER
A. L. Coburn

find we had tastes we knew not of. Once get liking Wagner, and it becomes a passion.

The idea of applying photography to artistic ends quickly took root. Stieglitz exhibited his work in photographic circles all over the world, and won medals everywhere. He had made converts and he realized that the time had come for those few workers to band together and combine their efforts. With independent means, and a born organizer, he assumed the leadership. The result was the New York Camera Club, which became the center of a new movement.

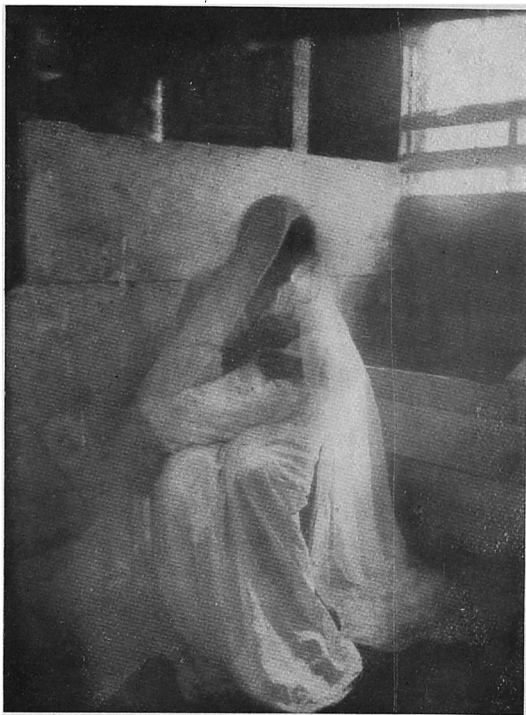
The first newcomer was F. H. Day, who created a sensation in the photographic world with his Christ pictures, taken in the open air with

paraphernalia specially prepared for the purpose. It was the boldest and most ambitious venture ever undertaken by a photographer, and although the pictures were not as successful as his studio effects—he excels in draped figures—they proved that the highest pictorial elements are possible in photography. The next step was taken by Gertrude Käsebier, whose portraits have a delightful, old-masterish quality. She was an amateur painter, had studied art, and knew how to lend her pictures the character of a Holbein, Rembrandt, or a Mary Cassatt, or in other words, the true painter-like qualities, as far as conception and composition go. She was one of the first to open a studio and take pictures on strictly artistic lines.

The Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts opened its galleries in 1898 to an annual exhibition of pictorial photography. It brought out Käsebier and Day, who were very little known to the photographic world at that time, and Clarence H. White, who saw in photography a medium for serious, high-class book and magazine

illustration. He knows how to adapt himself to an author's idea, is a master of composition and characterization, and has the technicalities of photography at his fingers' ends. His "Eben Holden" has opened up a new field to photography, which promises endless possibilities.

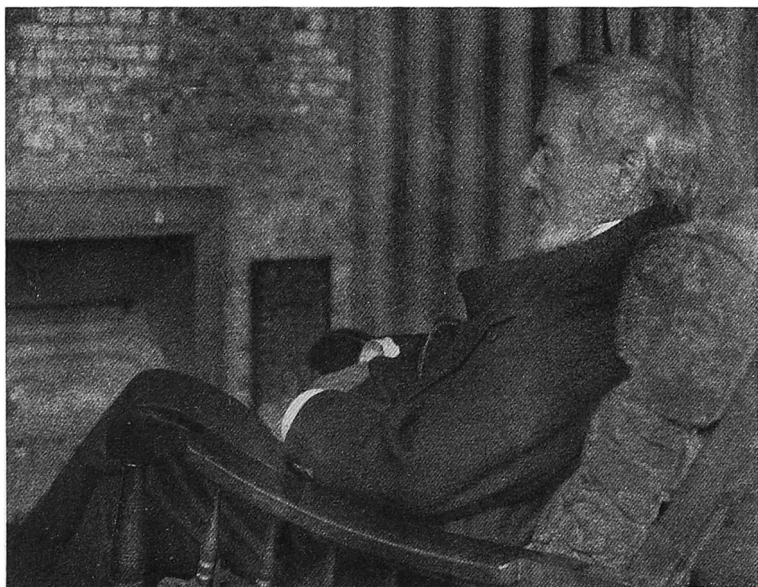
To this point the new school of photographers had worked faithfully within the limitations of the photographic art; that is, the members had not endeavored to borrow technical means from the other arts. But with the second or third Salon, which brought Edward J. Steichen and Frank Eugene to light, the situation changed. Both were painters by profession, and in order to secure higher pictorial qualities—a certain texture which the ordinary photographs lack—they began to manipulate their prints and introduce foreign elements, like lineworks and brushmarks, which are not natural to the technical means of photography. Frank Eugene introduced the process of photo-etching, in which the negative is manipulated with engraving tools. And both did not hesitate to paint in entire backgrounds on the negative, putting in light effects and treating the negative very much as if it were an etching or monotype. Furthermore, the gum process and the glycerine process, which made elimination possible, were introduced, the first by Robert Demachy in Paris, and the other by J. T. Keiley in New York. Blurred or washed-out effects, or imitations of other



THE MANGER
By Gertrude Käsebier



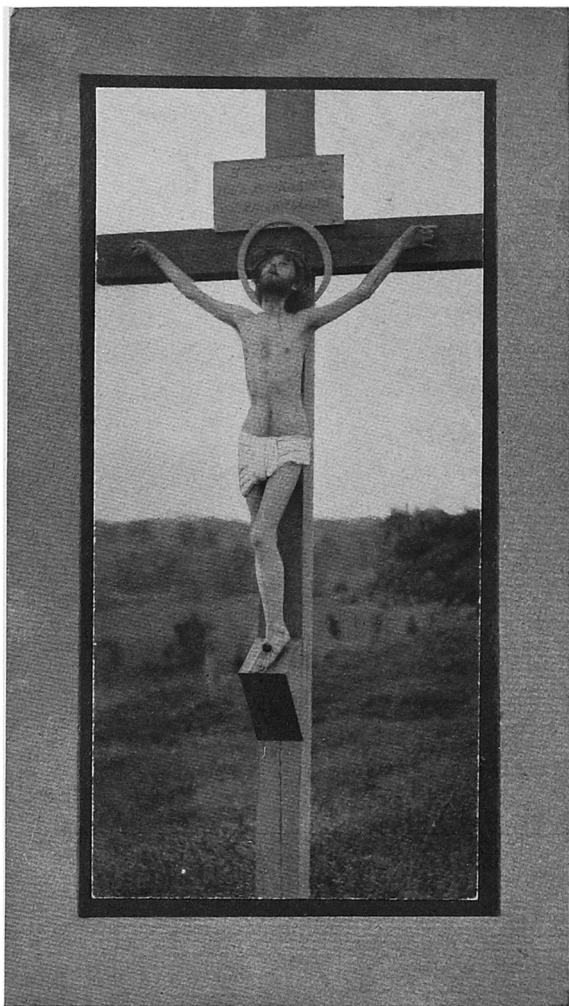
IN THE WOODS
By Eva Watson Schütze



THE DYING FIRE
By C. Yarnall Abbott

technical mediums, became the fashion. And in the recent exhibition, a total suppression of almost every quality which we customarily associate with photography is to be observed in very much of the work.

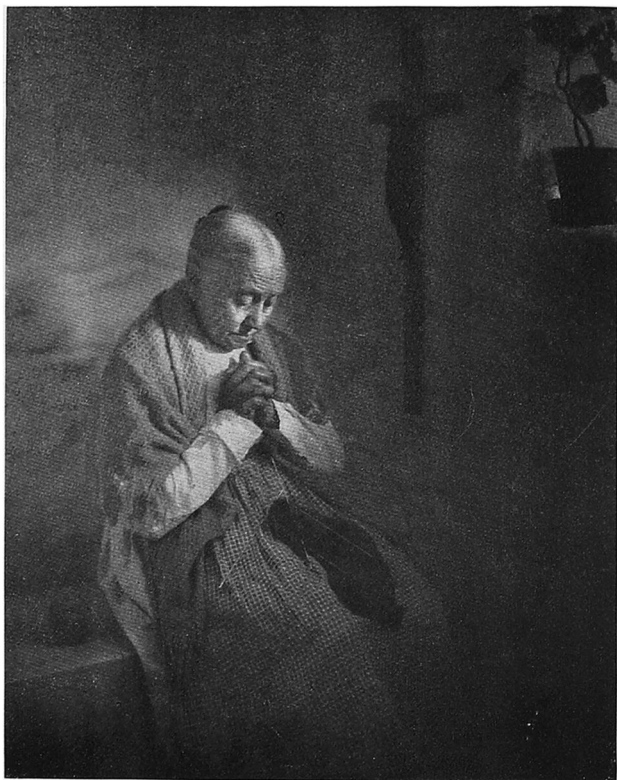
The pictorial quality of the photographic print has reached a very high standard. The monotonous platitude of the average photographic print has been broken. And whoever sees a Steichen print must confess that it possesses high artistic qualities. And now as the pictorial photographer has accomplished his task, a reaction in favor of work produced by less artificial means will probably set in. But for the present one can only congratulate the camera workers upon the success they have achieved. They have raised the standard of photographic work to a high degree and brought so much enthusiasm to it, that its very ear-



CRUCIFIXION
By F. H. Day

ness compels respect, if not admiration. I have not aimed in this article to be exhaustive—I have omitted many names of artistic photographers who have been doing most excellent work. Some of these are represented pictorially who are not mentioned in the text. This is due to the exigency of space, and is not to be construed as a slight to or reflection on the talented men and women who by their achievements naturally find a place in photography's roll of honor. The list of contributors to the exhibitions referred to speaks volumes, not merely for the ability, but for the number of the devoted and well-guided enthusiasts of the camera.

SADAKICHI HARTMANN.



DEVOTION

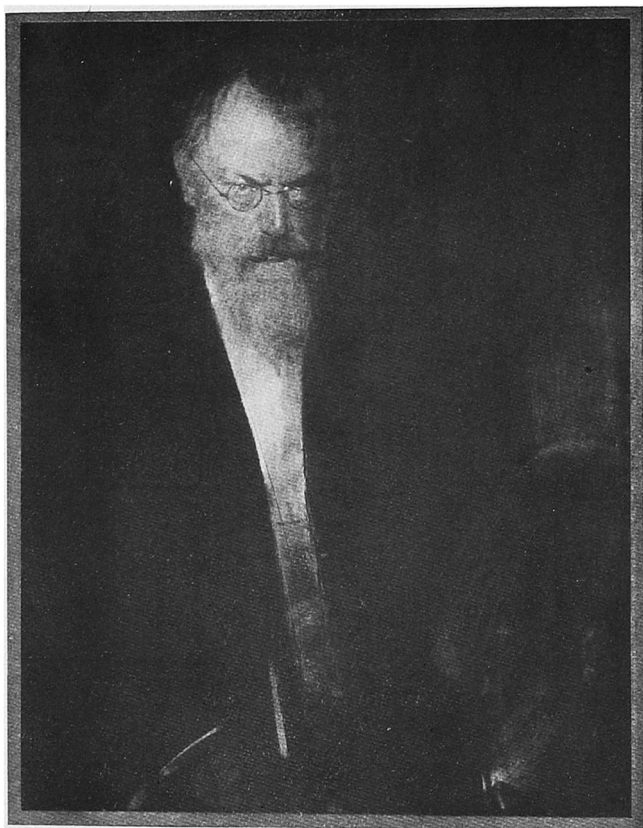
By Rudolf Eikemeyer, Jr.



A BIT OF VENICE
By Alfred Stieglitz



of the academy and of the Philadelphia Water-Color Club, shows how wise it was of the academy's management to omit water-colors from their regular annual exhibition, and to arrange for this subsequent display. Under the old order of things the water-colors in the acad-



LENBACH
By E. J. Steichen

emy's yearly shows were overshadowed completely by the larger works in oil. Crowded by necessity into the smaller galleries they were overlooked by many and rarely received the attention they really merited. In this instance the water-colorists and the users of pastel, having things all to themselves, take possession of the main galleries, and very handsomely they fill them.

✱ The Press Artists' League, New York, will maintain, after April 1, a permanent exhibition of drawings by illustrators of books and the daily and periodical press, in the new gallery at No 138 West Forty-second Street, known as The Hogarth Head. It is the desire



RODIN
By E. J. Steichen

of the league to give semi-monthly exhibitions of the original drawings of illustrators and the work of the younger American artists, from simple comics and cartoons in black-and-white to the more ambitious products in water-colors and oils.

✱ The offer of the New England Society to give a bronze statue—"The Puritan"—to Fairmount Park was accepted on behalf of the

old situation, when the museum was so crippled for funds that additions of value to its collection were fewer and far between. The present happy condition of the affairs is due to the added income of two hundred thousand dollars per annum, in round figures, from the



WINTER IN FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
By Alfred Stieglitz

Jacob S. Rogers bequest, to be wholly devoted to the purchase of art objects, including antiques and books. The old conditions were "hand to mouth," with an income of about ten thousand dollars a year to be applied to such purchases.

✿ The eleventh annual exhibition of the Cincinnati Museum Association will open on May 21 and continue to July 11. The jury of selection consists of Frank Duveneck, Paul Jones, George Debereiner,

L. H. Meakin, Miss Dixie Selden, Miss Henrietta Wilson, C. J. Barnhorn, and C. S. Kaelin. All communications and inquiries for desired information should be addressed to J. H. Gest, director.

✿ According to a report recently received from abroad, while foreign



HAPPY DAYS
By Clarence H. White

celebrities have been carrying off American honors and American orders the English and American painters have been gradually getting possession of the Paris salons, theirs being the larger percentage of works shown. The French are said to have suddenly awakened to this "national danger" and to have formed a new society, "La Société de l'École Française." The municipal council has granted the society permission to hold its first exhibition next June in the

Cours-la-Reine, and summer visitors will have three salons to visit instead of two. The projected movement has many hearty supporters. ♣ Pictures for the Canadian art exhibit at the World's Fair were selected by the Royal Canadian Academy, which has been holding its annual exhibition in Montreal. The fact that pictures hung in the annual show were to be chosen for the World's Fair art exhibit increased competition among artists of the Dominion. The Royal Canadian Academy wished to make the collection of paintings the choice of the art production of the Dominion, covering the last ten years. It is believed that Canada's art exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition will far surpass the display made at the Chicago World's Fair. Any work, dated in the last ten years, was eligible. About one hundred pictures were selected by a committee consisting

of Robert Hariss, C. M. G., president of the academy, Mr. Brownwell and G. A. Reid.

♣ The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts has purchased from funds of the Temple bequest the following pictures from the annual exhibition which recently closed: "Still Life—Fish," by William M. Chase, which it is fair to say is the best piece of still life he ever painted; "The Little Hotel," by Joseph de Camp; "Mother Love," by Myron Barlow; and "A Glimpse of the St. Lawrence," by Birge Harrison (for the Gilpin collection).

♣ The American Water-Color Society held a business meeting recently, and announced its programme for the thirty-seventh annual exhibition, which is to be held at the American Art Galleries, Madison Square, from April 30 to May 15, or possibly until the end of the month.



FRIENDS
By W. B. Dye

Carlton T. Chapman, No. 58 West Fifty-seventh Street, New York, is the secretary of the society, from whom circulars may be obtained. The members of the jury are George H. McCord, Jules Guérin, George Wharton Edwards, Alexander Schilling, Arthur Parton, R. Swain Gifford, W. H. Lippincott, Percy Moran, J. C. Nicoll, R. M. Shurtleff, George H. Smillie, and Thuré de Thulstrup. The Hanging Committee is composed of J. Francis Murphy, Frederick Dielman, and Walter Shirlaw.

✿ Albert L. Groll's landscape "Autumn" was awarded the Samuel T. Shaw prize of \$300 by the vote of the members of the Salmagundi Club, New York, for the best picture in the club's annual black-and-white exhibition.

✿ Plans for a permanent art gallery at Lexington, Kentucky, where pictures, statuary, and other work by the leading artists of the country may be shown and where the art treasures of the city may be safely stored, are on foot, the idea being to convert the old art museum in Central Park into a permanent one.

Bernard Flexner, in a letter to the Park Commissioners, made the suggestion some time ago, and it was favorably received by the board. The plan is to convert the old building in the northern end of the park into a modern art museum. The building was used for that purpose during the old exposition, and is a fire-proof structure. It is now in bad repair, but can be renovated and made admirably adapted to the purposes with the outlay of only a small sum. To maintain the museum, Mr. Flexner proposes that an association or corporation be formed, each member to be taxed a certain sum each year, and this fund to be used in securing the use of famous paintings for exhibition purposes and for the usual expenses incident to such a building.

✿ During the year 1903, over 400,000 visitors passed through the gates of the Pennsylvania Museum of Art at Philadelphia. The total



SADAKICHI HARTMANN
By Zaida Ben Yusef

♣ Mediocrity, it is reported, is the dominant note of the Art Club's thirteenth annual exhibition of water-colors and pastels. Work frankly bad is, indeed, almost lacking, but of the four hundred odd contributions which go to the making of the display few are worth



FLEUR-DE-LIS

By Rudolf Eikemeyer, Jr

more than a passing glance. Now and then one finds a bit which may be described as "clever," while some of the older men have sent representative examples of their skill, but the vast majority of the work shown is decidedly uninteresting. The reason for this lack of interest it might be difficult to assign; and perhaps it would be expedient to say simply that this is an off year.